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Ouachita students present scientific research at national conference

By McKenzie Cranford

April 29, 2014

For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at newsbureau@obu.edu or (870) 245-5208.

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. -- Four students from Ouachita Baptist University and their faculty mentors recently participated in the annual National Conference on Undergraduate Research (NCUR), the premier national research meeting for undergraduates, in Lexington, Ky.

"We're really proud of this group of students," said Dr. Tim Knight, dean of OBU's J.D. Patterson School of Natural Sciences. "They had the opportunity to present their research at the national level and did an outstanding job."

This year, the conference attracted more than 4,000 participants from all disciplines.

"The NCUR format is similar to OBU's Scholars Day with oral, poster and creative presentations," explained Dr. Marty Perry, OBU's Nell I. Mondy Professor of Chemistry. "There are plenary talks by well-recognized scholars, faculty networking sessions, an evening banquet and open house tours of facilities at the host institution."

"Our students really benefited from presenting to and listening to students who are working in other disciplines," said Dr. Nathan Reyna, assistant professor of biology.

Jessie Meyer, a junior biology major from Woodway, Texas, said, "This event provides us with a great opportunity to present our research to students without a science background. Since I am wanting to become a pediatrician, I will need to be able to explain difficult medical concepts to my patients in a way that they will be able to understand."

Meyer presented her biochemistry research poster, "Computational Docking Analysis to Increase Understanding of Chiral Drugs Metabolism," which she researched under the direction of Dr. Perry and has presented at several state, regional and national meetings.

"Jessie is a talented researcher and has a knack for explaining complex material with ease," Perry said.

Additionally, Dr. Reyna was selected to give an oral presentation, "From Freshmen to Seniors: Ideas for Incorporating Research into All Levels of the Biology Curriculum," in a faculty and administrator networking session.

"We are creating labs that are making students apply what they are learning in the classroom to real problems in different contexts," Reyna explained.

"I really appreciate the work of our faculty in pushing these students in their research efforts," Knight added.

Three other Ouachita students also presented their work at the conference. Emily Sanders, a senior biology major from Conway, Ark., presented a biology poster titled "Using the RBCL Gene and DNA Barcoding Techniques to Identify Members of the Cactaceae Family," which she researched under the direction of Dr. Reyna. Mikey Sullivan, a senior biology major from Kingwood, Texas, gave a cell and molecular biology oral presentation titled "Using an Innovative Three-Dimensional Spheroid Model of Tumors to Analyze the Effects of the Non-Psychoactive Cannabinoid Ajulemic Acid on Pediatric Cancer," which he researched under the direction of Dr. Lori Hensley, professor of biology and holder of the J.D. Patterson Chair of Biology. Dustin Walter, a junior biology and chemistry double major from Marion, Ark., presented a cell and molecular biology poster titled "A Radial Diffusion Assay for the Rapid Evaluation of Antimicrobial Peptides," which was a result of research he conducted under the direction of Dr. David McNabb, graduate studies chair of the department of biological sciences at the University of Arkansas.

For more information, contact Dr. Tim Knight at knight@obu.edu or (870) 245-5528.